

What is claimed is:

1 1. A communication device comprising:  
2 means for interrogating a plurality of wireless network access service providers  
3 to gather information related to service offerings thereof;  
4 means for obtaining a provider selection criterion associated with a user of said  
5 communication device; and  
6 means for selecting a service provider from said plurality of wireless network  
7 access service providers to provide wireless access to a network for said  
8 communication device based on said provider selection criterion and said information.

1 2. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said means for interrogating includes means for wirelessly transmitting a  
3 separate interrogation signal for each of said plurality of wireless network access  
4 service providers.

1 3. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said means for interrogating includes means for wirelessly transmitting a  
3 separate interrogation signal for each of said plurality of wireless network access  
4 service providers, said separate interrogation signal including an identifier uniquely  
5 identifying a corresponding service provider.

1 4. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said information includes information related to a cost of service offered by a  
3 first wireless network access service provider.

1 5. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said information includes information related to a connection performance  
3 available from a first wireless network access service provider.

1 6. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said information includes information related to a per user bandwidth available  
3 from a first wireless network access service provider.

1 7. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said means for interrogating a plurality of wireless network access service  
3 providers includes means for measuring a connection bandwidth associated with a first  
4 wireless network access service provider.

1 8. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said means for interrogating a plurality of wireless network access service  
3 providers includes means for requesting a relatively short duration connection from a  
4 first wireless network access service provider to allow a connection bandwidth of said  
5 first wireless network access service provider to be measured by said communication  
6 device.

1 9. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said means for obtaining a provider selection criterion includes means for  
3 retrieving said provider selection criterion from a memory within said communication  
4 device.

1 10. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said means for obtaining a provider selection criterion includes means for  
3 prompting a user of said communication device for said provider selection criterion  
4 using an input/output device.

1 11. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:  
2 said means for obtaining a provider selection criterion includes means for  
3 reading said provider selection criterion from a removable memory card.

1 12. The communication device of claim 11, wherein:  
2 said means for reading includes means for reading said provider selection  
3 criterion from a subscriber identification module (SIM).

1 13. A method for procuring wireless access to a network for a communication  
2 device, comprising:  
3 identifying a plurality of network access service providers that are currently  
4 servicing a present location of the communication device;  
5 interrogating said plurality of network access service providers for information  
6 using a wireless interrogation signal; and  
7 selecting a service provider from said plurality of network access service  
8 providers based on said information and a selection criterion.

1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein:  
2 identifying a plurality of network access service providers includes transmitting  
3 at least one inquiry signal and receiving response signals from at least two network  
4 access service providers.

1 15. The method of claim 13, wherein:  
2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first  
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal including an  
4 identifier uniquely identifying said first network access service provider.

1 16. The method of claim 13, wherein:  
2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first  
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal requesting  
4 information related to a cost of service associated with said first network access service  
5 provider.

1 17. The method of claim 13, wherein:

2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first  
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal requesting  
4 information related to a quality of service available from said first network access  
5 service provider.

1 18. The method of claim 13, wherein:

2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first  
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal requesting  
4 information related to a per user bandwidth associated with said first network access  
5 service provider.

1 19. The method of claim 13, comprising:

2 retrieving said selection criterion from a memory within said communication  
3 device for use in selecting said service provider.

1 20. The method of claim 13, comprising:

2 obtaining said selection criterion from said user via an input/output device  
3 associated with said communication device.

1 21. The method of claim 13, wherein:

2 said selection criterion is user-specified.

1 22. A computer readable medium having program instructions stored thereon for  
2 performing, when executed within a digital processing device, a method for procuring  
3 wireless access to a network, said method comprising:

4 interrogating a plurality of network access service providers for information  
5 relating to service offerings; and

6 selecting a service provider from said plurality of network access service  
7 providers based on said information and a selection criterion.

1 23. The computer readable medium of claim 22, wherein:

2 interrogating includes causing a first wireless interrogation signal to be  
3 transmitted to a first network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation  
4 signal requesting information related to a cost of service associated with said first  
5 network access service provider.

1 24. The computer readable medium of claim 22, wherein:

2 interrogating includes causing a first wireless interrogation signal to be  
3 transmitted to a first network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation  
4 signal requesting information related to a quality of service available from said first  
5 network access service provider.

1 25. The computer readable medium of claim 22, wherein said method includes:

2 identifying a plurality of network access service providers that are currently  
3 active in a location before interrogating.

1 26. A communication device comprising:

2 a wireless transceiver to transmit communication signals into and receive  
3 communications signals from a wireless communication channel via at least one  
4 antenna; and

5 a mobile client to procure wireless access to a network for the communication  
6 device, said mobile client including:

7 an interrogation function to interrogate a plurality of network access  
8 service providers that are active in a vicinity of said communication device  
9 using interrogation signals transmitted by said wireless transceiver, said  
10 interrogation function receiving information from said plurality of network  
11 access service providers in response to said interrogation signals; and

12                   a selection function to select a service provider from said plurality of  
13           network access service providers based on said information received by said  
14           interrogation function and a provider selection criterion.

1   27.    The communication device of claim 26, comprising:  
2           a memory to store said provider selection criterion, wherein said selection  
3   function retrieves said provider selection criterion from said memory for use in  
4   selecting said service provider.

1   28.    The communication device of claim 26, wherein:  
2           said selection function prompts a user of said communication device for said  
3   provider selection criterion using an input/output device of said communication device.

1   29.    The communication device of claim 26, wherein:  
2           said mobile client further includes an identification function for identifying said  
3   plurality of network access service providers that are active in said vicinity of said  
4   communication device for use by said interrogation unit.

1   30.    The communication device of claim 26, comprising:  
2           a memory including a list of network access service providers that provide  
3   network access services to the public, said plurality of network access service providers  
4   that are active in said vicinity of said communication device representing a subset of  
5   said service providers on said list.

1   31.    The communication device of claim 30, wherein:  
2           said list of network access service providers includes a radio network name for  
3   each of said network access service providers.